VOLUME CII NUMBER SIX

THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE

DECEMBER, 1952

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Sixty-four Pages of Illustrations in Color

PUBLISHED BY THE
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY
WASHINGTON, D. C.

$6.00 A YEAR 60¢ THE COPY

Boom Time in Kuwait

An Obscure Persian Gulf Sheikdom, Enriched by Oil, Uses Its Wealth to Improve the Lot of All Its People

By Paul Edward Case

IN a sun-scorched corner of the Arabian desert I have been watching a revolution in progress.

It is a peaceful revolution. The only combat involved is that of man versus his ancient adversaries: time, distance, climate.

Man is winning, and his prize is oil—millions of barrels of oil from one of the richest pools in the world.

The scene is Kuwait, a British-protected Sheikdom on the northwest rim of the Persian Gulf. Slightly smaller than New Jersey, it comprises about 6,000 square miles and has Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and a Neutral Territory as neighbors (map, page 787).

From approximately 135 wells the Kuwait Oil Company, Ltd., is producing about 800,000 barrels of oil daily. Gulf Oil Corporation and Anglo-Iranian Oil Company jointly own the operating concern.

Kuwait's total proved reserves—oil still in the ground—are 16,000,000,000 barrels, or roughly half the total reserves of the United States.

Kuwait Suddenly Becomes Rich

Most dramatic effect of this bonanza is the sudden fattening of Kuwait's income at the rate of an estimated $150,000,000 a year—the Sheikdom's 50-percent share of Kuwait Oil Company profits.

By dynastic law this windfall goes into the hands of the absolute ruler, His Highness Abdullah as Salim as Subah, who thus becomes one of the world's richest men (pages 791 and 800). If he chose to spend it on yachts, palaces, or racing stables, or just keep it under his bed, no one could say him nay.

But His Highness has elected to use his vast wealth for the good of all his people. Through an ambitious program of public works the ruler has started the construction of a model community in an ancient and neglected region of the world.

In all my years as a resident of the Near East, I have never witnessed a greater transformation.

Until a few years ago the obscure Sheikdom's 170,000 inhabitants quietly occupied themselves with the time-honored pursuits of pearling, fishing, seafaring, and shipbuilding. The capital, also called Kuwait, was known chiefly as a junction of caravan routes and as home port of deep-water sailing dhows.

Fortunate geographical position and easy customs regulations give Kuwait a brisk traffic in many kinds of goods flowing between Europe, Asia, and Africa. Now, after centuries as a placid trading center, Kuwait has become a mushrooming boom town, just as has happened frequently in America's petroleum-rich Southwest.

On the streets, Arabs in flowing robes slip along silently beside Americans and Europeans in business suits or work-stained khaki. Accents of Texas and Oklahoma, London and Zürich mingle with guttural Arabic. Camels and donkeys, once lords of the road, step warily lest they tangle with American cars, trucks, and earth-moving machines. In the harbor the ancient dhows rock in the wash of passing tankers.

Flow Increased after Iran Shutdown

The curtain rose on the Kuwait drama in 1936 when a well was drilled near Al Bahara, north of the port across Kuwait Bay. It was a dry hole, a failure. Within two years operations were begun in the Burgan area, to the south, and the result was a steady succession of producers.

Activities were suspended in 1942, because of the war, and resumed in the latter part of 1945. After Iran shut down its Abadan production in 1951, thereby denying the United Kingdom one of its chief oil sources, Kuwait's output was increased from a little more than 450,000 barrels a day to its present 800,000.*

In the Neutral Territory south of Kuwait American companies have completed several test wells. Results have not been announced. If this field should prove a producer, it would mean even more riches for Sheik Abdullah Salim. He and Saudi Arabia's King Abdul Aziz al Saud jointly own the Neutral Territory.

All is hustle and bustle now within and beyond the crumbling old wall that surrounds three sides of Kuwait. Shiny new sedans glide through the widened gates. Trucks and trailers thunder in and out. Kuwait dashes to work in the tempo of Times Square. There is little time for the old greeting at the gate, and hardly any for the former ever-ready cup of spiced coffee.

The Kuwait Oil Company has 7,165 men on its payroll. About 750 English and Ameri-

* See "Journey into Troubled Iran," by George W. Long, National Geographic Magazine, October, 1951.



George Rodger, Magnum

Kuwait's Ruler, His Advisers, and Oilmen Inspect a Tanker-loading Pier

Large enough to berth eight tankers, the Kuwait Oil Company's Mena al Ahmadi terminal can load more than 100,000 tons of crude every 24 hours (page 786). Oil royalties have made Sheik Abdullah Salim (in light robe) fabulously rich (pages 783, 791, and 800). Here he walks with Texan L. T. Jordan (extreme right), general manager of the company.

cans supervise this force, which is 57 percent Kuwaitis and other Arabs. To train Kuwaitis in modern industrial techniques, the company operates an elaborate school (page 801).

New oil wells are being drilled and new fields are being named. American oilmen run many of the rigs. Floodlights turn the desert night into day.

British and Americans have also helped build a pier more than 4,000 feet into the Persian Gulf. At the T head of the pier tankers daily take on enormous loads of crude oil and sail away to the world's markets.

At the same pier cargo vessels discharge tons of pipe, machinery, vehicles, and other equipment necessary to a huge industrial undertaking. A new city, Mena al Ahmadi (Port of Ahmadi), grows out of the sand at the land end of the pier.

Smiling English girls welcome visitors at the company's offices. Englishmen and Americans everywhere guide the work of unloading freighters, loading tankers, laying pipe, managing storeyards, operating the small topping plant (a petroleum still), and a hundred other jobs.

All this oil activity is some 25 miles south of the town of Kuwait. Except for the unloading and storage areas in Shuwaikh, just west of the city wall, the oil operations are well beyond sight of the city itself.

The Old Lives Beside the New

Leaving the Machine Age maelstrom and passing through one of the four teak-planked gates in the city's 15-foot mud wall, I found a fascinating jumble of new and old. Bedouins and their ancient gear brush shoulders with Kuwaitis in Western clothes tailored in Baghdad from latest English patterns. A bright new station wagon displaying an airline's insigne was parked in front of a new shop furnished with Indian carpets, American tables and chairs, and teakwood paneling.

Across the central market square, called



Paul Edward Case

Merchants Walk a New Street Cut Through the Heart of Booming Kuwait

Asphalt, brought from Iran's Abadan refinery before its shutdown, paves the surface. The shop, which specializes in rugs and pearls, also offers antique firearms, coats of chain mail, brassbound chests, pottery, and dusty odds and ends. The two traders wear Arabian robes and headdress, protection against both heat and cold, above Western suits. The Sheikdom is spending millions of oil dollars on improved streets, sewers, and water mains. Mud-wall houses, which collapse under heavy rains, are giving way to cement-block structures.



George Rodger, Magnum

Tankers Drink Their Fill of Kuwait Oil in Less than Eight Hours

Loading quays form the crossbar of a steel T thrusting nearly a mile into the Persian Gulf at Mena al Ahmadi. Special fenders, developed for World War II's artificial harbors, yield under impact, protecting pier and ships in rough weather. Temperatures ranging from 30° to 170° F. cause 24-inch pipes to expand and contract severely. To allow for movement, the lines are mounted on rollers, with an S-bend at the pierhead.

Safat, I saw a forest of heads where men from many countries sat cross-legged on high benches and sipped cardamom-flavored coffee or sweet tea.

Iranians, Iraqis, Baluchis, Indians, Nejdis, Hejazis, Omanis, and Arabs from all over the peninsula chatted about the work they were doing or hoped to do in this boom town.

Houses Razed to Widen Streets

On the "street of pillars" is the busy office of Kuwait's Public Works Department. Here the ruler's half-brother, Sheik Fahad bin Salim as Subah, presides over the huge job of changing completely the country's face.

On a big map each type of work, such as road widening, water-pipe laying, sewer-line construction, asphalting, or electric-power installation, has a code color. Some jobs were well along toward completion; others were still on the boards.

From an engineer in the office I learned that many houses were being demolished to provide wider and straighter streets. Miles of pipe were being laid to distribute pure distilled water from a new 1,200,000-gallon-a-day Westinghouse sea-water distillation plant.

Kuwait has only brackish water in its wells, and this has been a major deterrent to development of the city. The new sea-water distillation plant will be one of the largest in the world. The evaporators will be run on steam taken from four 7,000-kilowatt steam turbine-generator units now being built by Westinghouse at its Sunnyvale, California, plant. These units will provide Kuwait with its first major source of electric power.

I strolled on one of the newly widened avenues and descended a short, steep hill to the new Government-built port at Shuwaikh. Shining warehouses of corrugated iron held incoming stores. Plans call for a long pier

to deep water and for free-port facilities.

Inside the protecting breakwaters I saw hundreds of Kuwait dhows tied up to the busy wharfs or riding at anchor (pages 792-3 and 796). Most were of the type called *booms*. These craft sail the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean, bringing to Kuwait the best of Indian and African products or raw materials.

Booms have distinctive teak bowsprits rising to rounded black ends often set off by a white band. Hulls and bows are polished with fish oil. Below the waterline a pasty white concoction of lime and tallow serves as an antifouling paint. Kuwait booms are known far and wide for their sturdiness, and their captains for their ability.

Dhows Bear Strange Cargoes

As I watched the unloading at the new port, the strange cargoes fascinated me. Three ships were loaded to their built-up sides with date pits. These were being sacked and weighed at the ships' sides to be resold as donkey or goat feed. Date-palm branches in heavy bundles filled other ships.

Both pits and branches had come south from the Shatt al 'Arab, formed by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers northwest of Basra in Iraq. Bricks, square and yellow, had come from Iran.

Great hand-blown bottles, also Persian, each containing three to five gallons of a fruit juice for flavoring tea, were encased in wicker jackets. Dates from Basra or near-by areas were piled high in many ships.

Always at the bottom of the date ships was a thick puddle of molasseslike syrup full of debris, flies, and sand. Children filled crocks and tins with the black juice.

I saw several ships loaded with crushed shells mixed with sand. Men hauled this in baskets on their heads to waiting trucks and donkeys. Others spread the material on the pier and causeway to level up the new roadways.

In the center of all this activity, a large sail was laid out on the newly sanded dockyard, and five men began to sew up long tears.

As noon approached, fires were lighted in fireboxes, standard equipment on all booms. Men later squatted aft around steaming dishes of rice and a spicy sauce set out on bright enameled trays. Eating with their right hands, they often waved to me, calling "Tafaddal" (Welcome—Be our guest). Among the sailors were Iranians who smoked hubble-bubble pipes with gaily colored stems.

Kuwaiti women were seldom seen, although some busied themselves with peddling chickens in wicker baskets or in sewing clothes brought to them for repair.





Drawn by Irvin E. Alleman

Kuwait's Only Oil Outlet Is the Troubled Persian Gulf

Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrein, all close by, offer tempting prizes to an oil-hungry aggressor. Neutral Territory, owned by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, holds out the prospect of another rich pool. Kuwait stepped up its production when Iran seized the huge British refinery at Abadan. Tankers load at Mena al Ahmadi, near the Burgan field.

A few other women had apparently come to the pier to see their husbands' or fathers' boats. Dressed in their finest, with gold ornaments, heavy veils, silver toe rings, and silver anklets, they kept together in small groups. Each talked only to her own man when she reached his ship.

Some new booms were being built. Ancient methods of handwork are used—father teaching son, with nearly equal affection for the son and the craft they create.

Heavy Indian teak logs, hand-sawn into one- and two-inch planks, lined the shore. Masts and spars were stacked in the yards along with tree crotches for shaping and bracing the insides of the booms. Blacksmiths

made spikes with big, fat heads and straps or angles to strengthen ships. Old men sat in the sunshine on carved teak benches or on the mud-and-cement seats built into their shop walls along the road.

Youngsters Make Mechanical Toys

Children played marbles among the ships' stores. They made flat lanes in the sand with their fingers to help them shoot straight. Others spun tops whittled out of teak and tipped with a nail.

Still others had toys made of tin cans. One was a good facsimile of a truck. Another toy was a set of wooden wheels on an axle mounted on a stick. The handle could be worked, lever style, to turn the axle. It was most ingenious for a boy of ten; proudly he told me he made it himself.

The pearl trade, highly important in the days when Kuwait helped supply the rich markets of India and Europe, has declined in recent years. The reason: development of the cultured pearl. In 1900 the pearling fleet numbered some 600 vessels; today only a few visit the Persian Gulf banks.

As in the past, the proceeds of pearling expeditions are divided in accordance with ancient custom. The captain and divers each receive three shares of the proceeds, the rest of the crewmen two shares each.

At one end of the water front the Mission Hospital of the Dutch Reformed Church of America stands in spacious grounds. For 40 years its good people have served the sick of Kuwait. Recently one doctor and his wife contracted tuberculosis. They are now recovering in America, and I hear they look forward to returning to Kuwait in the near future.

How Oil Pays Dividends in Health

Oil wealth has made it possible for Kuwait to invest heavily in its own well-being. The new State Hospital is visual evidence of the great plans the Kuwait Government has for improving public health. It has 120 beds, a surgery, private rooms, tiled wards, a patio, and a beautiful view of the sea.

Another State hospital has 160 beds and is at present used only for pulmonary diseases. There are two clinics, each serving about 100 cases daily. A trailer dispensary constantly patrols outlying areas (page 802). A Public Health Section sprays DDT on all homes, stores, stables, and anyone near its busy machines.

Unfortunately, the hardy Bedouin of the desert has contracted tuberculosis from contact with outsiders. The disease takes heavy toll each year.

Kuwait has set aside a large sum for combatting lung troubles, with ample additional funds to care for convalescing patients during the long periods needed to fit them for the hard life to which they return.

There is even a Veterinary Department. Mrs. H. R. P. Dickson, a long-time Kuwait resident, told me she had seen a neighbor's boy leading a cow homeward from a distant part of town. When she asked the boy where he had come from, he answered matter-of-factly, "From the cow hospital."

The Veterinary Department hopes to impound all incoming animals for a few days to reduce the danger of animal-borne disease, which could grow to epidemic size quickly in Kuwait.

All this health service is free, even the cow's hospitalization. Only for spectacles and precious metals for tooth fillings are there nominal charges. Private wards in the hospital levy a token charge of $2.10 a day.

Nearing completion is a 250-bed eye hospital and a 750-bed general hospital, expandable to 1,200. This enormous medical center will be located west of the city on the shore of Kuwait Bay, in buildings containing the latest and best of everything.

Doors Are Like Museum Pieces

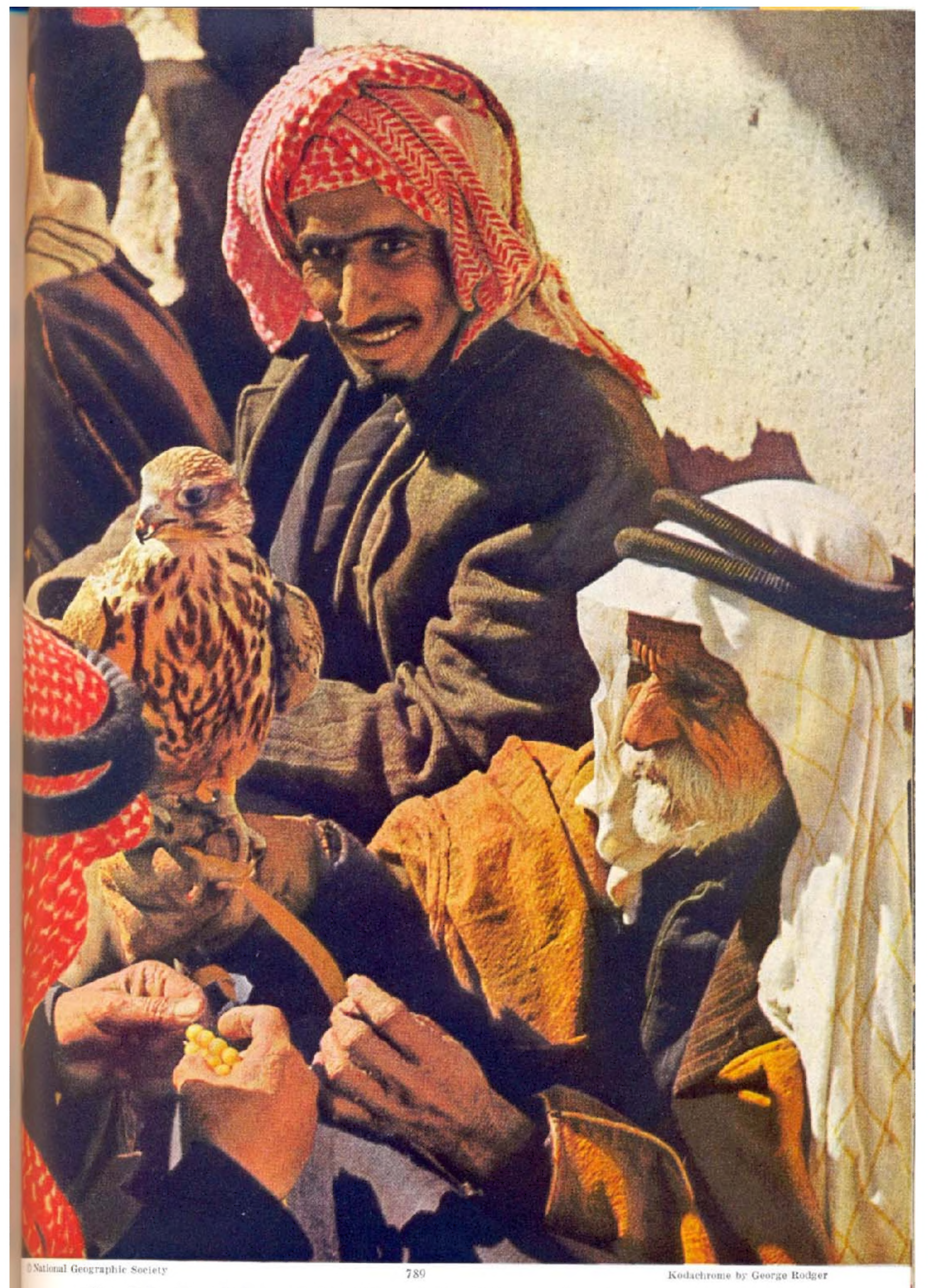
From the water front I returned to the town through a residential area of mud and coral houses. The old houses were beautiful in their plainness, but the large teak doors took my fancy. They are hand-carved, studded with big flat nails in patterns, and bearing large wooden locks with wooden keys shaped like toothbrushes.

I found myself looking at door after door. The larger ones, for convenience, often had a smaller door cut into one of the halves. Some bore the same designs seen on the sterns of dhows. Many doors had graceful brass knockers like those made in Isfahan.

Newer houses showed the expanding influence of Basra and Baghdad. Overhanging porches or latticed second-story verandas, scalloped hoods to shade windows, beveled-edge cement blocks, and doors of Basra style all manifested Kuwait's connection with the Tigris Valley cities.

Because there are no satisfactory finished building materials at hand, Kuwaitis import cement to make concrete blocks with their plentiful sand. Blocks and sills of a house are made on the site. The ground and even the road in front of a house will often be covered with drying bricks, blocks, or bigger slabs.

During the winter, if heavy rains fall, much damage is done by collapsing mud walls of the older houses; hence the popularity of cement.



Kodachrome by George Rodger

For Sale: One Falcon. "Make Me an Offer," Says a Kuwait Street Vendor

Let others get excited over oil; this graybeard and friends discuss a young hawk's fine points. Properly trained, such birds kill small game for their masters. Falconry is a favorite sport with Kuwait's Arab chiefs.



Band and Guard Honor Kuwait's Chief of Public Security

Upon Sheik Abdullah Mubarak's shoulders falls the job of preserving law and order while his country pushes a huge improvement program made possible by oil millions. At his command is a force of 400 men equipped with modern weapons.

Here Abdullah Mubarak (center) returns a salute as he leaves his office. Bodyguards, advisers, and secretaries accompany the Governor. Police guards line the stairs.

Sheik Abdullah Salim, Kuwait's Benevolent Ruler, Spends Long Hours Studying Problems Brought by Sudden Wealth

An estimated $150,000,000 a year, half the profits of the Kuwait Oil Company, goes to the Sheik. Able to spend as he pleases, he has launched a public works program to help all his subjects. Left: Armed guards stand by as the ruler leaves Council Hall. Lower right: A hand-kissing subject greets the Sheik (left) on return from an air journey. Upper: Boy Scouts display the Kuwait flag.

Kodachromes by George Rodger



Teak-hulled Arab Dhows Rest Between Voyages in Kuwait Harbor

Kuwait throbs with activity in the midst of one of history's greatest oil booms, but its waterfront sights, sounds, and smells suggest the days of Sindbad the Sailor.

Even before the oil bonanza, Kuwait was a prosperous community because of its maritime importance.

Throughout the Persian Gulf and adjoining waters, Kuwait mariners are known for daring, skill, and solid reliability. Kuwait shipwrights, most expert on the Gulf, keep busy building new dhows and repairing old ones for pearling, fishing, and trading.

Legend has it that Noah's Ark was the dhow's prototype. Kuwaitis and other sea Arabs never use the word "dhow"; they call their ships *baggalas, booms, sambuks*, or *zarooks*. Each has a distinctive hull form.

Most popular is the swift, seaworthy boom, sharp at both ends and with a rakish teakwood sprit rising at the bow (extreme right).

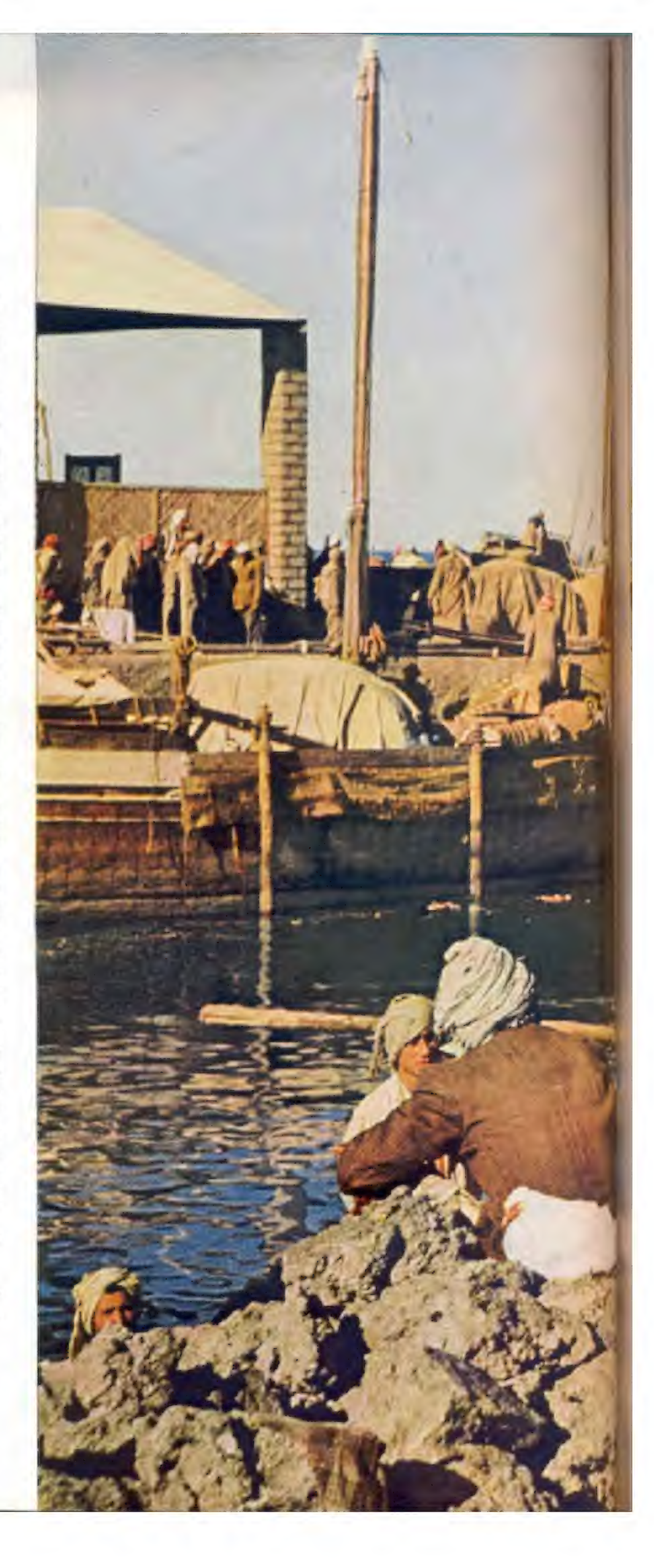
When neighboring Iraq harvests its dates, many Kuwait dhows sail 160 miles to Basra to load cargoes of the fruit. Then the ships spread lateen sails and head down the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea to eastern Africa's markets, seeking the highest prices.

Calling at ports along the way, the dhows pick up other freight as well as scores of pilgrims, until decks are jammed and freeboard all but vanishes.

Larger dhows, leaky and overloaded, cruise thousands of miles under conditions that would appall most seafarers. Usually, a compass is the only navigation aid. Lights, pumps, charts, barometers, logs, and chronometers are missing. Moslem crews, praying five times a day, place their faith in the wisdom of Allah—and the skipper.

"If Allah is kind, the ship arrives," they say.

Kodachrome by George Rodger

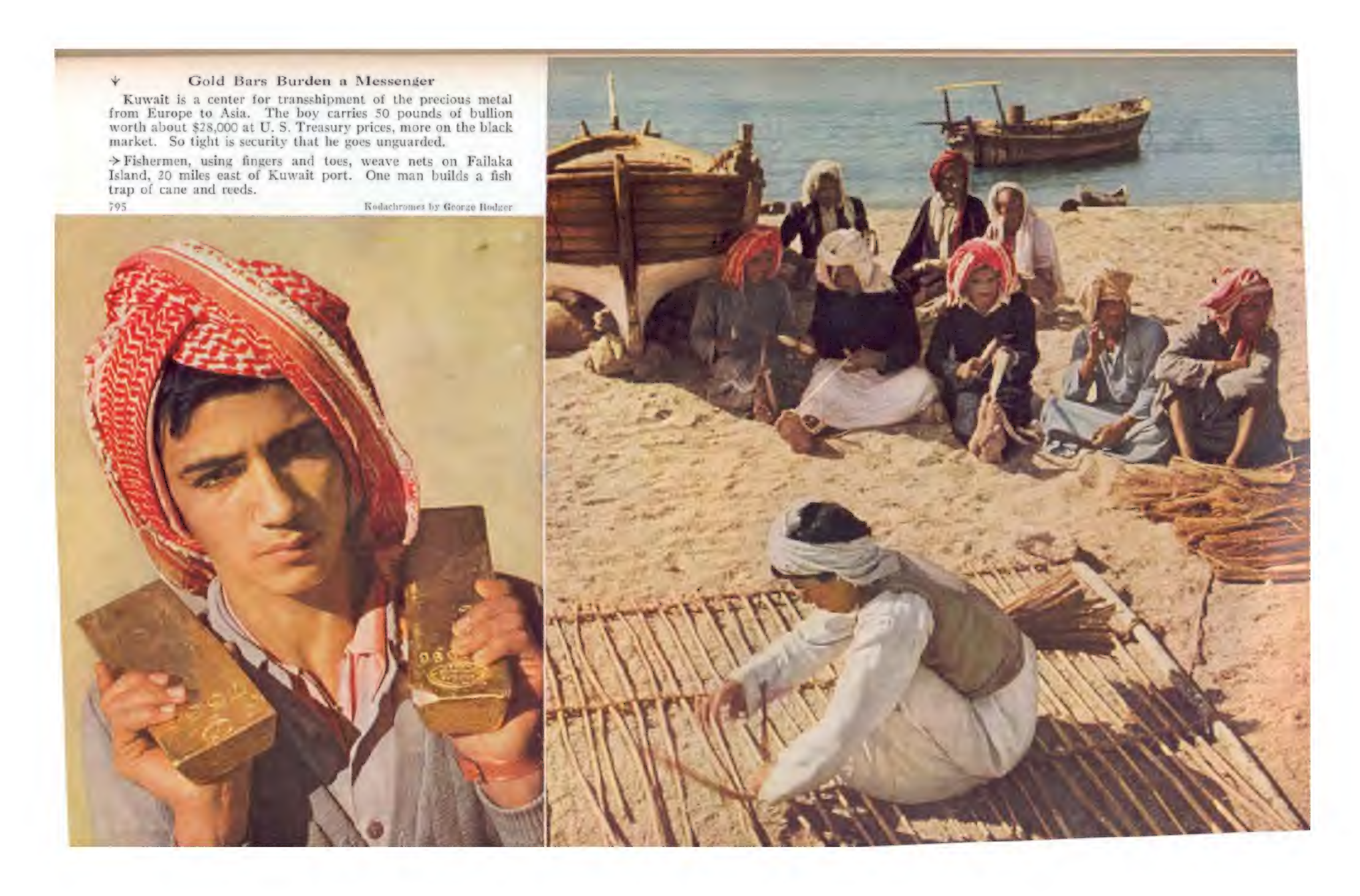






A Checker Game Engrosses Water-front Idlers; Baled Rugs Conceal Their Bearer

Tons of bright Persian rugs like these pass through Kuwait en route to interior markets. *Dama,* the checker game, is a favorite with Arab peoples.



↓ Gold Bars Burden a Messenger

Kuwait is a center for transshipment of the precious metal from Europe to Asia. The boy carries 50 pounds of bullion worth about $28,000 at U. S. Treasury prices, more on the black market. So tight is security that he goes unguarded.

→ Fishermen, using fingers and toes, weave nets on Failaka Island, 20 miles east of Kuwait port. One man builds a fish trap of cane and reeds.

Kodachromes by George Rodger



Kodachrome by George Rodger

Kuwait Shipbuilders, Masters of an Ancient Art, Shape Iron-hard Teak with Adzes

Logs of proper length are selected for keel, stem, and sternpost. From these basic timbers the dhow grows, plank by plank; the only plans are those in the boss shipwright's mind. A few dhows have engines.

I like to walk the still streets on a moonlit night when silent, barefoot Arabs, perfumed with sandalwood or attar of roses, pass with a soft Arabic "God bless your evening." Their gold-embroidered, hand-woven robes and snow-white headdresses gleam in the silvery light.

I saw one large wind tower, such as those that dominate one's distant view of Nain and Yezd in Iran. These towers are usually a story higher than the roof of a building. They are large hollow, square shafts, the center part of which is divided into four equal V-shaped sections with the point of the V aimed toward the center. They can catch the breeze from any direction. Outside surfaces of the towers are open or latticed so that the wind can enter to be directed down into the house.

This primitive form of air conditioning is thousands of years old. In Yezd I once slept in a room which was cooled by such a tower. Although other friends in different parts of the house found the night warm, I had a blanket over me all night.

Dhow Masts Help Build Houses

In Kuwait, the soft, yellow bricks imported from Iran are sometimes carved just as they are in Tehran, Ahwaz, Kerman, or any other Iranian city.

Some new houses under construction showed interesting uses of old materials. Discarded masts from old dhows became rafters. Other masts were sawed up to make window frames and doors. Coral rock and even mud were used over again in some places.

I came suddenly upon the western edge of Kuwait's bazaar and was immediately a part of a noisy crowd, which contrasted sharply with the stillness of the dwelling area I had just left. Women, veiled and swathed in black *abas*, were seated on long cement slabs, with their wares neatly piled before them on pieces of cloth to keep them clean.

Most women had new and old parts of clothing which they had made or mended, but their stores included almost everything—modern and antique, useful and junk.

From one of the veiled women I purchased a small brass teapot. When I pointed to it, asking the price, she hesitated, then picked up a pair of muslin Bedouin underpants with embroidered cuffs.

Her snickers were met with my laughter, and I said, "No, the teapot."

Unbelievingly, she lifted up the blackened object. It had a saucy crest like a peacock's tuft on the top lip of the spout, and a graceful handle. The whole thing was only four inches high but complete with lid and undented. Although it was sooted and covered with black blotches, its shape and a little spot of brass on the lid had caught my eye. I didn't bargain with her price—one Indian rupee (21 cents).

She shook her head wonderingly as I carried off my treasure. It now gleams in a place of honor on our buffet.

A little mortar and pestle set from this same woman's bazaar is a companion to the teapot. We use them as a bell at the dining table.

From Spark Plugs to Perfume Bottles

The wares these women offered seemed endless. There were dresses, head cloths, pants, baby clothes, hinges, screws, beads, mirrors, crocheted caps, sweaters, tools, spark plugs, tea and coffee cups, locks, keys, candy, rose-water shakers like long-necked saltcellars, perfume bottles (empty and full)—and I even saw a carom board.

Beyond this peddlers' paradise, shops crammed full of supplies from many parts of the world stretched far down the streets. One shop had mats hung on its open wooden doors. They were of woven straw, circular and in bands of colors. There were also pretty square fans woven of palm leaves on a stick of midrib from a palm branch.

Other shops had kitchenware—aluminum pots and pans, Czechoslovakian and Japanese enameled bowls and dishes; perfumes from India; candy; American chewing gum, including bubble gum; cloth, blankets, and an enormous variety of notions such as cotton, silk, and nylon thread, needles, beeswax, and dozens of kinds of Hamburg edging.

My Arab driver always buys a few yards of this lacy edging for his wife. I believe a new edging on a dress is the Arab way of making one over for a new season, since the few dresses I have seen seem to have straight lines and to be of one style.

Food shops were frequently mixed in among the rest. India, Ceylon, or Sumatra tea was a common sight, as well as dates, rice, whole-wheat flour, dried beans, wheat, dried peas, saffron, sugar, curry, natural lake-dried salt, whole dried peppers, and cans of sheep and camel fat.

Some Shops Cut in Half

Many shops had the tiny slim-waisted glasses from which Arabs love to sip sweet tea. Coffee, served in small porcelain cups, is flavored with crushed cardamom seed from Ceylon. Bedouins also add powdered Zanzibar cloves to the coffee.

Some shops carried on even though they had been cut in half to make room for a new street. Several sold phonographs and records. In one of these I stopped to see and hear an ancient machine with a lily-shaped horn.

Bicycle-renting shops were common. I never realized how much one could hang on



George Rodger, Magnum

Kuwaitis of All Levels, Eager to Increase Knowledge, Give Close Attention to a Lecturer

The speaker, standing under a basketball hoop at Mubarakiyya Secondary School, talks on Arab art in Spain. Such sessions are held for students and the general public. The guest of honor, Sheik Abdullah Mubarak, Chief of Public Security and son of the school's founder, sits in front row, center (page 790). Because of his high rank, chairs beside him remain vacant.

a bicycle until I saw some shooting past, weaving reckless paths through the crowded bazaar. Some had paper flowers on the front-wheel frame; others had the entire frame wound with plastic tape; still others had hand-embroidered seat covers; and all had little woven tasseled bags, like camel panniers, hung over the center bar just behind the steering post. These bags were gay with colored hand-woven wool.

Sellers Model Secondhand Clothes

Near the new main street was a secondhand auction. Men would throw an overcoat or other garment over their shoulders and parade through the mob, shouting the asking price.

Kuwait receives large quantities of American secondhand clothing. Suits, topcoats, and odd jackets made by famous tailors can be found in such bazaars. A labor foreman we once hired had a stylish overcoat from a well-known New York shop.

These clothes arrive from America in bales. They are sorted and resold to merchants who take them across the desert to Nejd (the central region of Saudi Arabia), across the Gulf to Iran, and northwest into Iraq. Now many are bought in Kuwait itself.

Handsome chests, made in India and ornamented with solid brass studs and handles, were piled high in two or three shops. A large one with a beautiful lid of grained wood struck my fancy. I haggled with the shopkeeper, but couldn't coax him lower than 250 rupees ($52.50).

I had seen similar chests for 150 rupees when I lived in Kuwait in 1942. The influx of Westerners has changed many things. But the chest was whole and in excellent condition, so I bought it and took it home as a Christmas present for my wife.

Some time after Christmas a friend from Egypt visited us. One of the first things shown her was the chest.

Her appreciation was a smile and, "Oh! we had those in Mother's time. Every house had

one. Today we want modern things. Our brides now demand those nice sleek, veneered suites of American dining-room furniture and such things."

A generation ago every Arab girl usually had a Kuwait chest for her trousseau. Now we newcomers love them for their beauty and utility.

One shop displayed a large sign, "Penicillin for sale." Once, in Basra, I asked a druggist what things he sold the most. "Black hair dye, stomach medicine, and stimulants to make old men virile," he confided. Kuwait druggists told me the same thing, adding vitamin pills as a close competitor.

In the center of the bazaar stands the post office, and I bought a few of the Kuwait Olympic Commemorative stamps.

Behind the post office is a street of food and vegetable shops. Dates, mostly from Basra, were on display in many shops. The round 60-pound bundles were cut in half, showing dates ranging in shade from tan to black.

Here were pomegranates and potatoes from Iran, large pumpkins from Basra or the Zubair Islands in the Red Sea, onions from Iran, dried hot peppers from north of Basra, oranges, lemons, and sweet limes from Baghdad. Many other things, even fennel from near-by Safwan, were plentiful.

Buyers Compete for Fresh Fish

Off this busy street I passed through a gate and entered a beehive of excitement. It was the fish market, an open square surrounded by stalls. Baskets of gaily colored fish were everywhere.

The fish were like those in books—blue or gold fins, glistening silver bodies with black stripes. Some were large-headed and ugly; others beautiful, with velvety bloom of many hues. There were great heavy fish and tiny pan-size varieties.

What a sight, and what a commotion! It seemed as if everyone wanted to get fish at once.

Another gate a little farther down the street led into a similar square. This was the meat market. Here the carcasses, fresh from slaughtering down on the beach at the west end of town, hung on nails driven into posts or dangled from hooks attached to ropes on pulleys from the roof. Most of the meat was from sheep; a little was beef, and a small amount camel.

Walking out toward the center of the city again, I saw more phonograph shops, and barbers in their brightly decorated stalls.

On the long benches in front of some shops men sipped coffee poured by a wandering coffee boy. He usually has a brass pot with an extra bottom to hold burning charcoal. Three or four empty coffee cups, clicked between his fingers, signal his approach. Regular customers pay by the week or month, transients by the service—two to four tiny cupfuls.

Everywhere there is change. Crooked old streets are being straightened; cement blocks are replacing mud walls. Pants and shirt are crowding out the full-length gown. Western machine-made goods outsell local handmade products.

Shops formerly piled high with tent sides, hand-woven of goat hair or sheep wool, or with brilliantly colored hand-woven camel saddlebags, are now gay with Persian carpets and foreign-made cloth.

Even gunsmiths, who always sat encircled by ancient long-barreled muzzle-loaders ornamented with gold and silver bands, now have cleaner shops where they repair automatic shotguns and delicately etched double-barreled foreign guns.

One man had three Colt automatics hanging on the wall behind him while his partner worked on the stock of a .22-caliber rifle with a telescopic sight. Everything new to catch the modern Kuwaiti's eye—and his cash—is now the vogue.

Two tall radio towers dominate the wide central square. They broadcast the programs of Kuwait's new station.

In many parts of the city are new schools of spacious design. The buildings are made of concrete blocks, and each has a large central patio surrounded by airy rooms. It was a fine sight to see the happy, healthy, smiling faces of the boys as they rushed out of school at noon hour.

A Step Forward for Girls

Even more interesting was the news that, of about 8,500 school children in Kuwait, 2,500 are girls—a third of all the school-age girls in the city. One must travel in the Near East to realize what a step forward this is in a part of the world where girls suffer great disadvantages.

Arab youths are now demanding that the mothers of their children be intelligent and up-to-date. The radio has popularized the educated girl. An untaught girl will soon draw only the duller boys.

The Education Department of Kuwait demonstrates the Arabs' love of children in a most dramatic manner. Its lavish program and speed of execution stagger the visitor.

Sheik Abdullah al Jabir, the Minister of Education and a respected magistrate, is the architect and director of Kuwait's education plans. Dr. Darwish Mikdadi, assistant director of education, is his right hand in directing



George Rodger, Magnum

Desert Croesus: He Spends to Help His People

Oil puts about $150,000,000 a year into the bank account of Sheik Abdullah as Salim as Subah, ruler of Kuwait. He keeps only a fraction for his personal needs. The rest he turns back into schools, hospitals, roads, and public buildings. One of his most important projects is a plant which will distill fresh water from the sea, giving Kuwait its first adequate supply (page 786).

the department's far-flung operations. As I write, there are 144 Kuwaiti teachers, 17 of whom are women, and 254 foreign teachers, of whom 95 are women. In the city are eight girls' and 12 boys' primary schools and one boys' secondary school. Outside the city, in the Sheikdom's smaller settlements, are 10 more schools.

Fine Homes for Teachers

Beyond the city, on the shore of Kuwait Bay, between the new medical center and the city, is a new secondary school for 500 boys. All students will live at the school in a modern separate hostel. The teachers have fine homes which dwarf those of the oil company executives. The school building has three laboratories, an auditorium, a big lecture hall, a cafeteria, a fine gymnasium, and an athletic field.

A teachers' training school is planned next, and at the same time a vocational training school for 250 boys will be built.

At present there are 124 boys out of the country on scholarships paid for by the Education Department. There are 90 in Egypt, four in Beirut, and 30 in England.

Like medical care, an education in Kuwait is free for the asking. The Government even provides clothing, noon meals, health inspections, and transportation when needed. Kuwait is caring well for its children—the harvest will come later.

No Income Taxes!

Kuwait levies no taxes on individual persons, income or otherwise. There is no duty on incoming essentials such as food and common cloth, and all dutiable imports are very lightly taxed.

C. J. Pelly, British Political Agent for Kuwait, is one of the ruler's chief foreign advisers. From him and the groups he represents, Sheik Abdullah Salim gains valuable counsel in handling Kuwait's income and in administering the public-works program.

The United States is represented by Consul Enoch Duncan, well liked and highly respected by the Kuwaitis.

Not the least of Kuwait's problems is that of holding reserves for the future, when oil income may not be as great as now enjoyed.

Behind all of the modernization and breathless expansion is Kuwait's ruler, Sheik Abdullah Salim. He is a true Arab with all of an Arab's personal integrity and simplicity. When in 1950 he was called upon to rule his people, he replied that if he did so he would not allow any changes in his personal way of life. He wanted no fancy trappings, no



Gulf Oil Corporation

Vocational School Turns Desert Nomads into Skilled Craftsmen

To fit Kuwaitis for responsible oil-field jobs, the Anglo-American producing company operates a training center at Magwa (page 784). Here, after basic schooling in arithmetic and English, trainees advance through courses in many trades. These students work on a problem in electrical engineering.

royal robes. His daily meeting was to be open to all who wished to see him.

The Sheik has kept to exactly the type of rule he outlined, and his ministers have been chosen well. They have been made independently rich to be above temptation.

Officials Have No Money Worries

Said Mr. Izzat Jaffar, personal secretary to the ruler: "We all have our own fortunes, which have been made ample. That leaves us free to do what we wish most—to build our own monuments in solid public works benefiting our people."

The founding fathers of three centuries ago would never know their village. Arab legend tells us that the Bedouin tribe of Beni Khalid created Kuwait. Probably Barrak bin Ghurair, head of the Beni Khalid and lord of Hasa (now a province of Saudi Arabia), was its founder.

In administering his great territory, Barrak, who lived about 300 years ago, is supposed to have felt the need of a port in the northern part of his domain and to have caused some of his subjects to move to what is now Kuwait.

The first sheik of the present line of rulers was Subah Abu Abdullah, who seized the supreme power in 1756. Just before Subah's conquest, there had moved to Kuwait from Aflaj in lower Nejd a confederation of Bedouins led by the three families of Subah, Khalifa, and Jalahimah.

The Khalifas later seceded from the confederation and moved to Qatar, where they would be nearer the main pearling banks. The Jalahimahs also seceded and moved to the Arabian mainland, leaving Kuwait to the Su-



George Rodger, Magnum

A Mobile Medical Clinic, Bought with Oil Wealth, Tours Kuwait Villages

For ailing Arabs who cannot travel to the capital, the Sheikdom provides an American-built trailer unit staffed by a physician, nurse, and technician. Here the doctor examines an elderly man at an outlying village; other patients wait their turn. Treatment costs them nothing. New hospitals, including one for animals, are part of Kuwait's heavy investment in its own well-being (page 788).

bah family. In the early 1780's the Khalifas again moved, this time to the Bahrein Islands. Here, except for a short interval, they have remained as rulers and now enjoy a steady income from oil as Kuwait does.

Al Saud Once Lived in Kuwait

King Abdul Aziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia lived in Kuwait from about 1893 to 1902. His family had been driven from the Nejd, where he was born in 1880, by a powerful rival, the Rashidi family. From Kuwait he and his father planned an offensive against the Rashidis. The astute Sheik Mubarak of Kuwait helped Al Saud equip the expedition, which had a brilliant success.

Later on, Al Saud's remarkable abilities made him the creator of Saudi Arabia and enabled him to give the country the security it now enjoys.

Ten years ago, in the rush of the war, I helped build barges on the beach west of the city. We were far out of town and almost the only persons beyond the walls. Some Bedouins, in tents clustered at the base of the city walls, were the only other outsiders.

Today our former house and cookhouse are homes for English oilmen. The barren beach has sprouted the town of Shuwaikh, with warehouses, compounds, piers, fuel tanks, and the huge sea-water distillation plant. The secondary school and the medical center are also parts of this growing suburb, where Westerners enjoy air-conditioned amenities.

Kuwait, the former sleepy village, has awakened with the coming of oil and is stretching its strong new limbs.*

* For additional articles on the Persian Gulf area, see the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE Cumulative Index, 1899–1951.